

Counting on Moru

Author: Rukmini Banerji
Illustrator: Nina Sabnani

PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Level 3



Moru had strong likes and dislikes. When he liked something, he loved it. And when he did not like something, he absolutely hated it.

No one could make him do things that he did not want to do and no one could stop him from doing what he wanted to do.



Moru liked to climb trees and steal raw mangoes. He would creep along the branch pretending to be a cheetah in a deep dark jungle. He enjoyed catching insects - the blue green bottle fly with the big shiny head, the thin and crisp grasshopper, and the yellow butterfly whose colour came off like powder on his fingers. Moru loved flying kites, the higher the better. He would climb to the tallest terrace to get his kite to soar far above the clouds like a brilliant eagle trying to reach the sun.



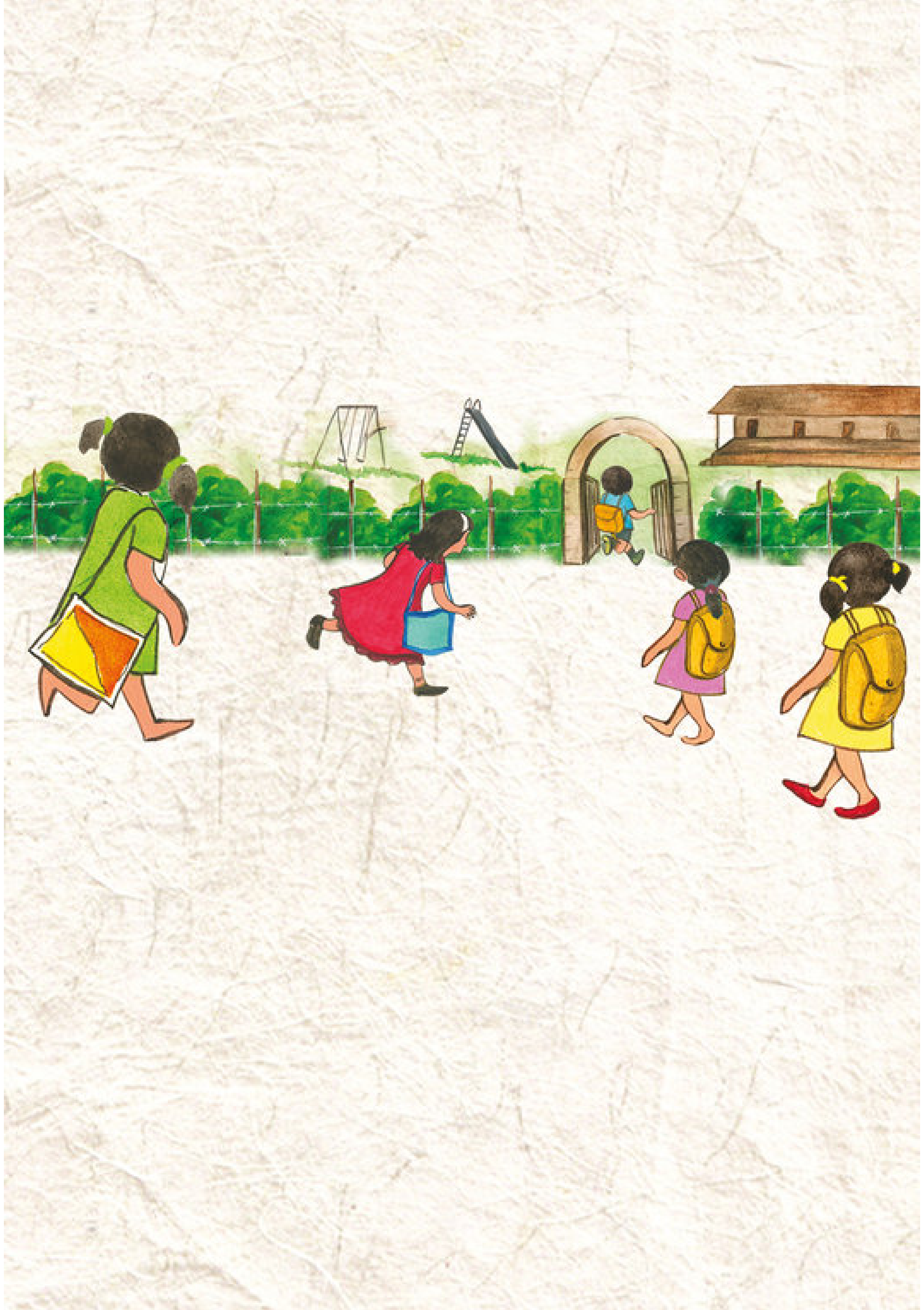
Moru liked numbers. Number 1 looked thin and lonely; 100 was fat and wealthy. How graceful 9 was, even more so when she stood next to 1 and became 19.

Numbers were like an unending staircase. Moru imagined climbing them one by one by one, racing up, sometimes two, sometimes three or four or more steps at a time.



When he was tired, he saw himself sliding down the banister with the numbers waving at him.

Unlike rice at lunchtime, which often finished before anyone was even half full, unlike friends who had to go home just as soon as the game was starting to be fun, numbers were always there. Unending and infinitely fun, to be juggled, sorted, matched, shared, laid out in a row, thrown away, put together and taken apart.

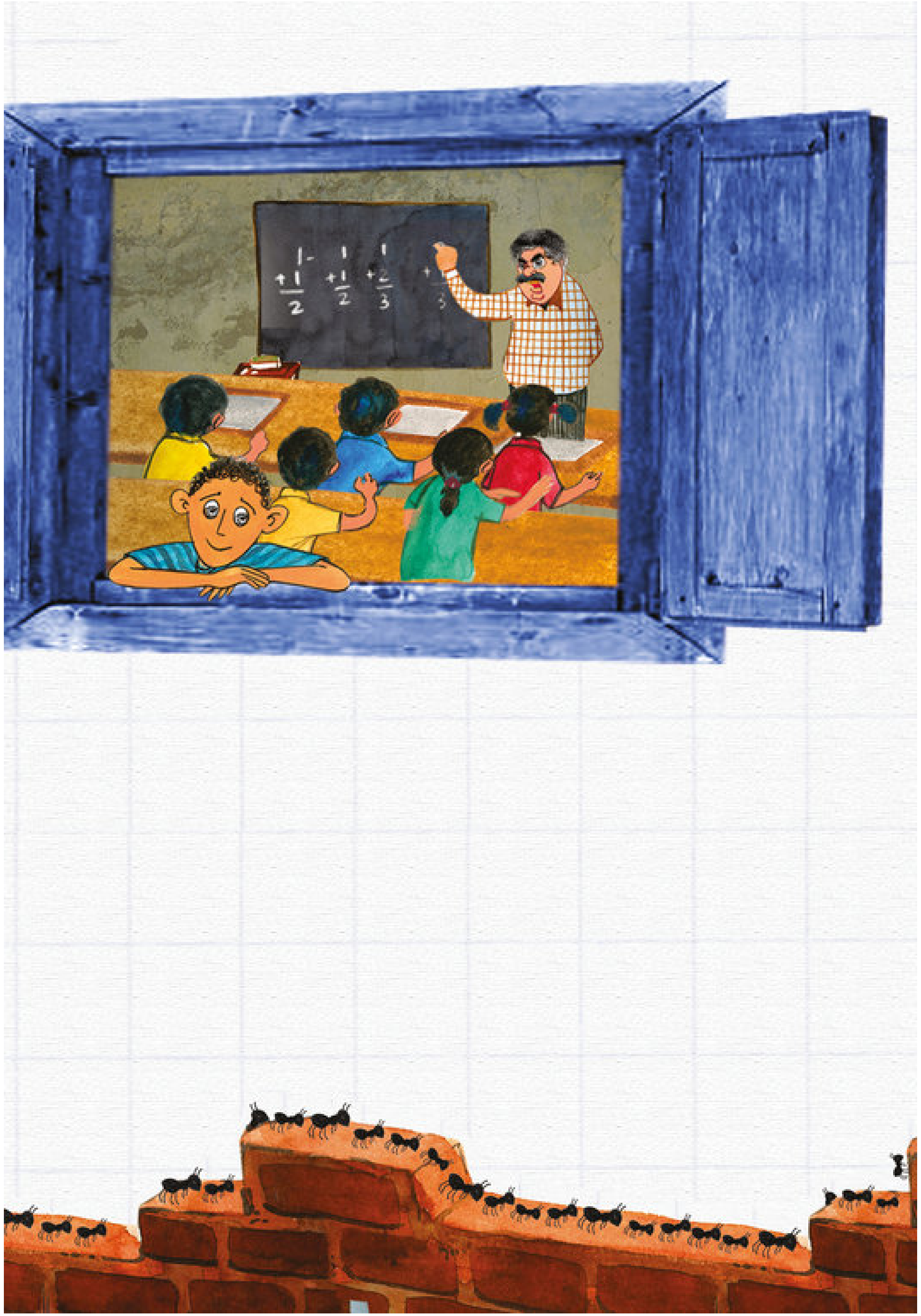


Moru liked going to school because many of his friends went too. He liked getting up in the morning and having somewhere to go. He liked the big playground but he did not like going to class.

He did not like the teacher. He felt trapped in the room. The children could not ask questions, they could not move around and they could not speak when they wanted to say things. The teacher was bad-tempered. Moru felt that the teacher did not like the children at all. Maybe he did not even like being a teacher or coming to a school. In any case, children did not like the teacher either.

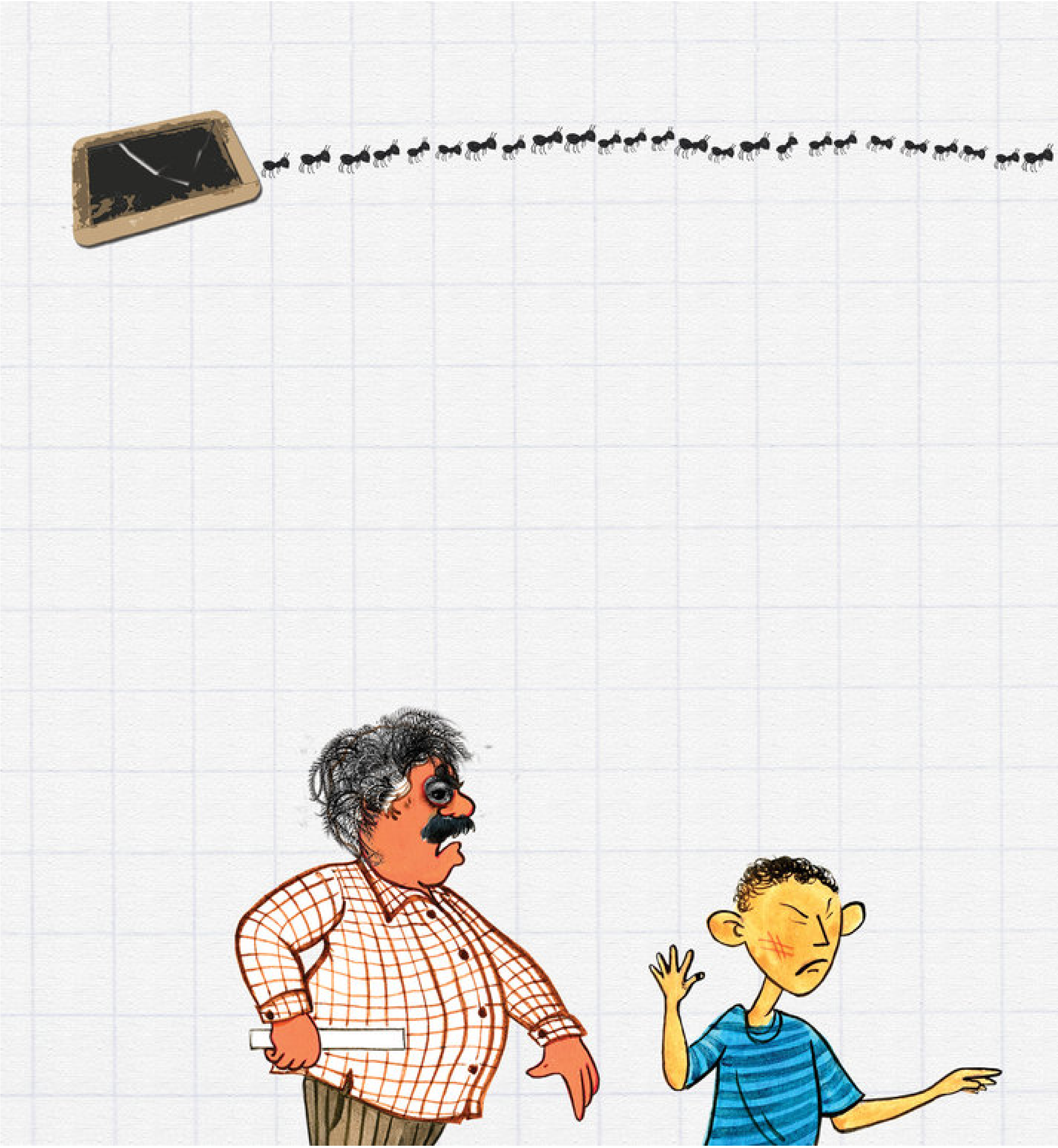


Every morning, the teacher wrote things on the blackboard. In a loud voice, he told the children to copy it down on their slates. Then he would go outside. If the boys could copy his things from the blackboard nicely, the teacher looked at it. If they could not do it, the teacher got angry. When he was angry, he would call the children names and if he got very angry he would hit them hard.



One day, the teacher wrote some sums on the board. The sums were easy but they were boring. Moru did not feel like doing them and he did not have a slate. His slate had broken and his mother did not have the money to buy a new one.

Instead he counted the hundreds of ants that were climbing the wall. He looked at the tree outside and noticed that the leaves were perfect. Perfect leaves had perfect shadows. In his mind, Moru counted how many broken bricks there were along the school’s compound wall. He calculated that if each brick costed five rupees it would take more than one thousand rupees to fill in all the gaps and broken spaces in the wall.



“Moru!” scolded the teacher. “Why are you not doing anything?”

Moru looked blank. “Where is your slate? Why haven’t you brought one to school?” shouted the teacher. Moru could see that the teacher was angry with him. Moru replied, “My old slate broke and I don’t have the money to buy a new one.” The teacher was angry and gave Moru a sharp tap with the stick in his hand.



Moru continued softly, "Even if I had a slate I won't do the sums because I don't want to." The teacher was furious. He slapped Moru. Moru's cheek burned bright red. Sudden hot tears sprang into his eyes. He stood up and ran out of the room, down the verandah, across the dusty playground, through the broken gate and away.





The next morning, Moru's mother woke him up in time for school. But Moru would not get up. He lay on the narrow bed with his eyes tightly shut.

Next day it was the same story, and the next day and the next. No one could persuade Moru to go back to school. One week passed and then one month. Moru sat on the wall in front of his house.



Sometimes he would disappear into the market for hours. He would try to fly his kite from the terrace but it was no fun because the sky was empty.

His mother scolded him, his brother teased him, his grandmother begged him, his uncle bribed him and his friends coaxed him. But nobody could persuade him to return to school.



The rains came and school opened after the summer vacation. Everyone thought Moru would go back to school with all the children. “No,” said Moru very firmly. A year passed.

Everyone gave up on Moru. Perhaps Moru gave up on himself too. Instead, he began to do other things.



He would go to the market and give the vegetable sellers a hard time. He would gang up with other children like him who had left school and tease and taunt the children who were going to school.

He would make paper airplanes out of the school notebooks of his friends. He would go up on the terrace and hit unsuspecting people who were passing by with pellets from his sling.



One day, the old teacher left. A new young teacher came in his place. That day Moru was sitting on the wall watching the children go to school. No one asked him anymore why he did not go with them. Instead, children avoided him because they were afraid that he would bother them.



The teacher was passing by. Moru looked at the teacher. The teacher looked at Moru Neither smiled and neither frowned.

The next day, at the same time and the same place, Moru looked down from the wall. The teacher looked up at him and smiled. It was a small smile. Moru jumped from the wall and ran away.



A few days later, the teacher was passing by. He was carrying a huge bag. The bag was very heavy. The teacher was having a difficult time. Moru scratched his head. The teacher passed him by slowly.

Moru thought and then he ran behind the teacher. Without saying anything, he took hold of one end of the bag. The teacher was relieved and together they were able to get the heavy load to the school quickly.



Inside the school , the bag was carefully put on the teacher’s table. The teacher opened the bag and let Moru look inside. There were many many books, colourful books of all sizes and shapes. They felt shiny and smelt new.

“Can you help me to take them out?” asked the teacher.



Moru began bringing out the books. There were books with stories in them, with pictures on the cover. Some were written in large letters. Some books had so much in them that the words had to be squeezed into the pages. Moru felt his excitement rising. He had not touched a book in two years.



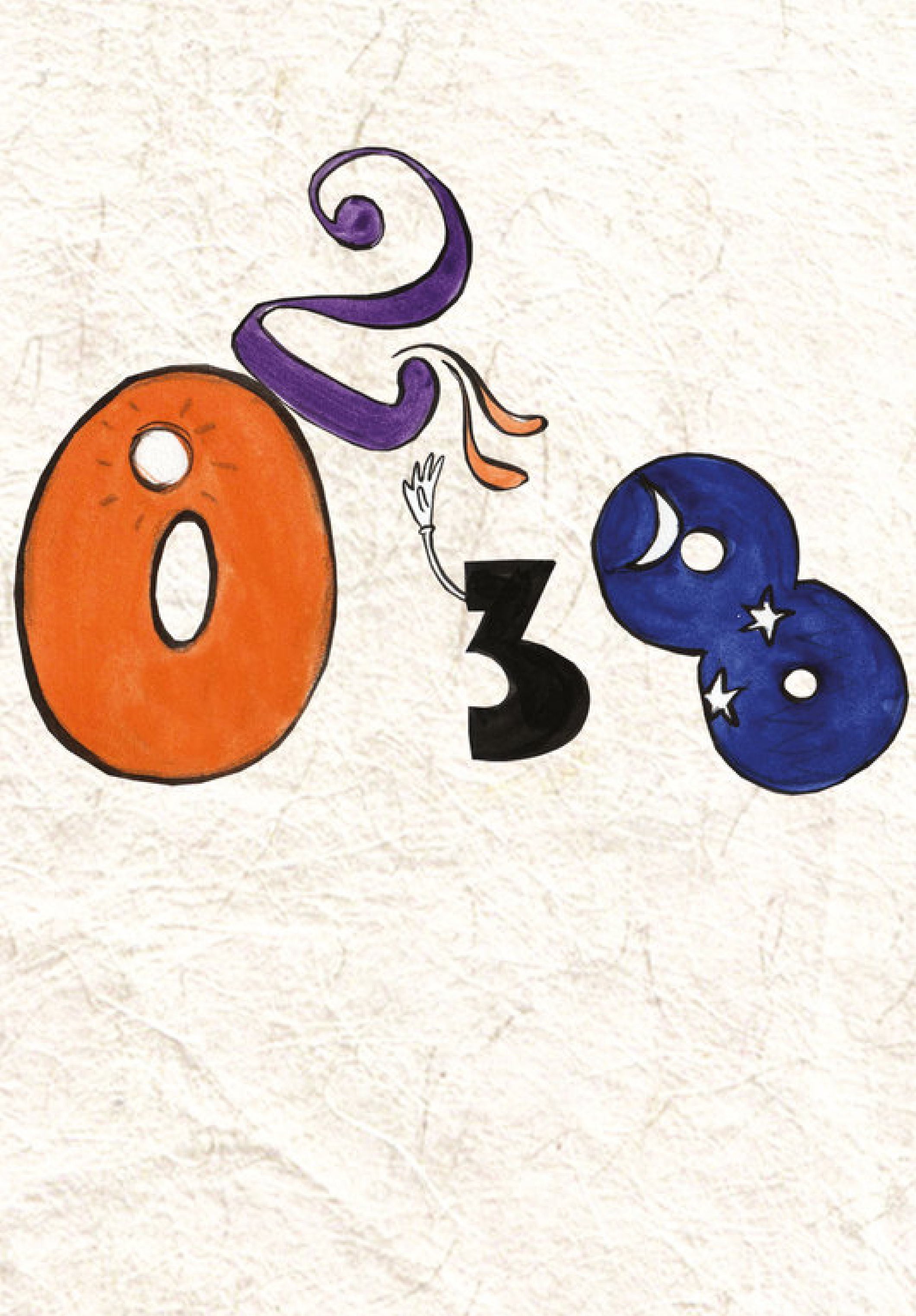
The next day, Moru waited till school was over and all the children had left. The teacher was alone. Moru went in quietly and stood by the door. The school seemed ghostly when all the noise and laughter and shouting was gone.

The teacher looked up and said, “Good you have come. I need your help.” Moru was curious. What kind of help could the teacher need? He had many, many children in his school to help him. In a very matter of fact kind of voice the teacher said, “Can you help me sort out the books?”



Moru sat on the floor. The books were all around him. There were so many storybooks.

He put the animal ones together. The leopard storybook would feel more comfortable with the elephants and camels. The fairytales could sit with the stories about gods and goddesses. The adventure stories sat on their own. Or maybe they should go with the heroes and famous people?



Then came the books with numbers. Moru's eyes and fingers slowed down. The fat numbers danced with the thin ones. Two digits balanced one on top of the other like an unsteady building still waiting for the base to be filled. The multiplication sums looked short and squat and got fatter and fatter at the bottom as the numbers got bigger.

Division was just the opposite.You began with a lot and then if you were careful, you worked it down to create a long thin graceful tail. If you were lucky there would be nothing left. One by one all the numbers and their tricks came back to Moru.



It was dark and the school had no lights. “You have to go home now, Moru, but you can come back tomorrow,” said the teacher. “But can you come when the children are here please?” Next day, soon after school started, Moru came. The children were surprised to see him and a little scared.

By now Moru was famous as a ‘dada’ of the neighbourhood. “I have someone to help me now,” said the teacher. He put Moru with the younger children. There were books in which the children were supposed to write.

“Please, can you help the children arrange these numbers in ascending and descending order?” The little kids scrambled around Moru; they were amazed that a tough fellow like Moru knew so much.



Moru made the children stand in a line - the smallest children at one end and the tallest ones at the other end. He gave them numbers to hold. Now it was easy. Just like with short children and tall children, it is easy to know who to put where, it was the same with the numbers.

Every day Moru would come for a little while and every day the teacher would give him a bigger and bigger task to do. Every day he found his love for numbers was getting stronger and every day his excitement and skill was being absorbed by the little children.

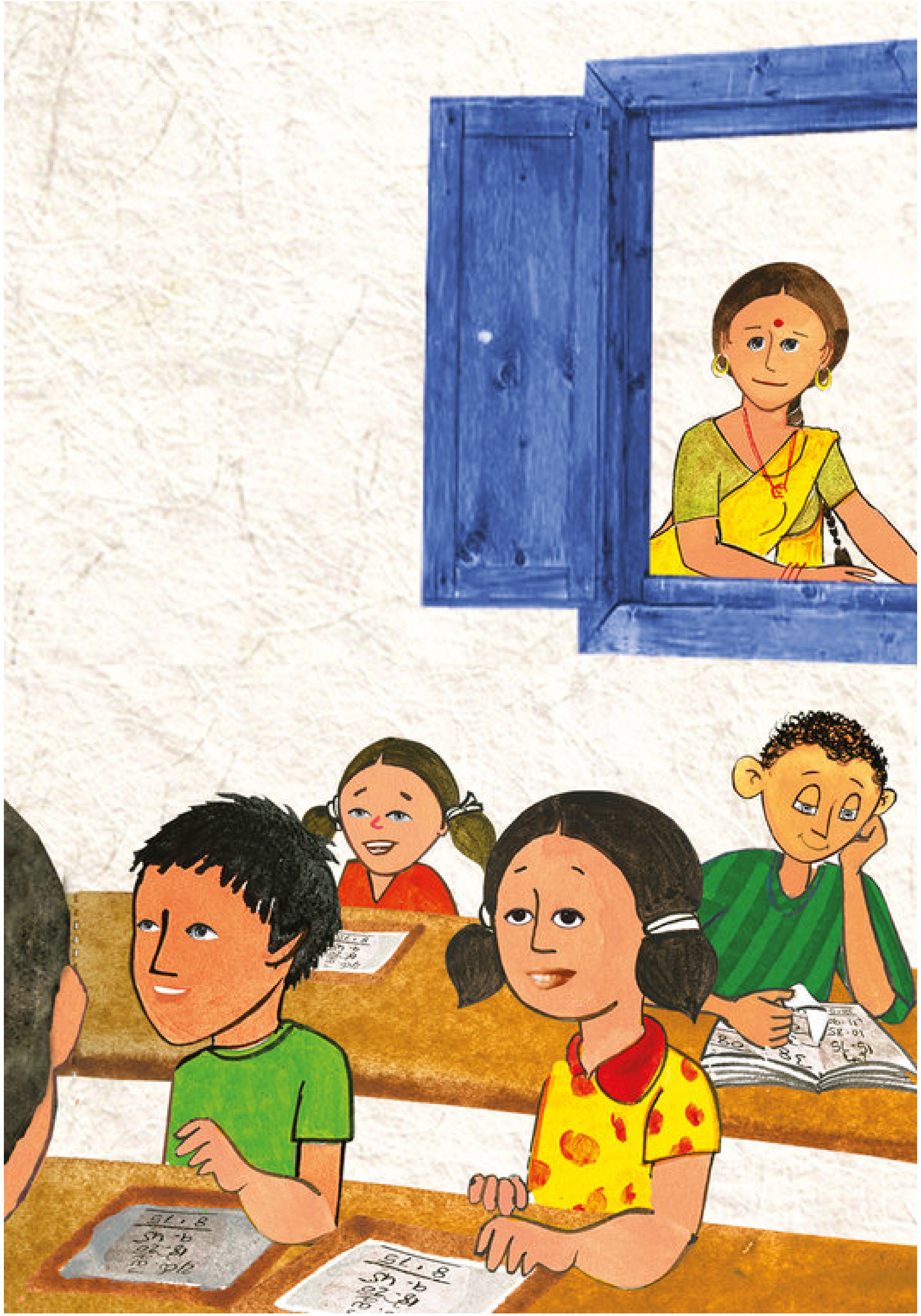


One month later, Moru's mother was looking for him in the middle of the morning. He was nowhere to be found. She looked on the terrace but he was not there. She looked on the wall where he normally sat dangling his feet, but only his kites were resting there.



She looked up on the mango tree, the leaves rustled in the breeze but there was no Moru on the branches. She went to the market but all the vegetable sellers were selling their vegetables without being bothered by the usual gang of boys.

Finally, she walked down the lane and happened to look into the window of the school.



There was Moru. His head was down, and he was looking carefully into his notebook. There was a frown of concentration on his forehead and a deep look of absorption in his eyes. He was busy solving complicated mathematics problems along with all the other children of his age.

The teacher looked out too, and he smiled his soft warm smile at Moru's mother. She smiled back happily. Moru was in school again.

This time he was learning more and more. And most importantly, this time he was loving it.

Story Attribution:

This story: Counting on Moru is written by Rukmini Banerji . © Pratham Books , 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Other Credits:

This book has been published on StoryWeaver by Pratham Books. The development of the print version of this book has been supported by Pratham e.V. and Project Dharma. Pratham Books is a not-for-profit organization that publishes books in multiple Indian languages to promote reading among children. www.prathambooks.org

Illustration Attributions:

Cover page: Boys playing with numbers, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 2: Boy's face , by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 3: Boy plucking mangoes from a tree and a butterfly nearby, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 4: Boy sliding down a spiral staircase with numbers around him, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 5: Smiling and waving numbers, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 6: Children going to school, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 7: Angry teacher shouting at a boy, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 8: Boy looking out of window in class, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 9: Teacher scolding boy, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 10: Teacher scolding boy, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 11: Mother waking son , by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Illustration Attributions:

Page 12: Boy walking sadly, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 13: Boy throwing a pail of water and a catapult , by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 14: Vegetable vendor looking up and paper planes nearby, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 15: Boy sitting on a window sill and looking at a man , by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 16: Boy sitting on a window sill and looking at a man , by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 17: Boy offering to help a man with a heavy bag by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 18: Boy looking on as man has bags on a table by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 19: Boy looking on as man has bags on a table by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 20: Boy and man arranging books, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 21: Boy reading books while crouched on the floor, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 22: Dancing numbers, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 23: Happy boy pointing, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Illustration Attributions:

Page 24: Children standing in order of height holding number placards, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 25: Woman looking at catapult on a low wall, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 26: Kites on a low wall, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 27: Woman looking into a classroom from the window, by Nina Sabnani © Pratham Books, 2012. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Counting on Moru
(English)

In Moru's world, numbers danced, digits waved out and long division looked ike a graceful tail. But one day, this world came crumbling down in school. Moru then became the local bully. Then, someone helped him discover the joy of learning again. Read all about it in this heartwarming story.

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.